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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report updates the Economic and Social Council on two cross-cutting issues relating to the regional commissions, namely, mainstreaming the regional dimension in the work of the United Nations and enhancing the coherence of the United Nations activities at the regional level in accordance with the guidance given in annex III to Council resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998. The report also provides, in section I, the report of the Executive Secretaries, which is submitted to the Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV). In addition, in response to Council decision 2004/213 of 13 February 2004, the report explores, in section IV, the theme for the regional cooperation item at the Council's substantive session of 2004, which is "Information technology for development: a regional perspective".

The resolutions and decisions adopted by the regional commissions during the spring of 2004 that require action by the Council or are brought to its attention are contained in addendum 1 (E/2004/15/Add.1).

The summaries of the economic surveys of the five regions are provided to the Council for its consideration (see E/2004/16-20). The annual reports of the regional commissions are made available as background information as they address matters relevant to the issues covered in the present report and its addendum. They are issued as supplements to the *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council*.

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Introduction

1. The regional dimensions of the work of the United Nations have received recognition and attention in recent years, as reflected in the 1997 programme for reform of the Secretary-General (A/51/950) and in Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III. As the regional outposts of the United Nations, and as an important part of their respective institutional landscapes, the regional commissions play a dual role. This dual role necessitates the mainstreaming of the regional dimension in the overall work of the United Nations at the global level and making efficient use of the comparative advantages of the regional commissions as a way to ensure coherence of the Organization's activities, particularly those in support of the Millennium Declaration and global conferences and summits, at the regional level.

2. Since the adoption of Council resolution 1998/46, the Secretary-General, through his reports on regional cooperation, has attempted to engage the Council in a dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions on the progress achieved towards linking the activities of the Commissions more effectively with the overall activities of the Organization in the economic and social sectors. **As part of this mainstreaming, the Council may wish to decide that the regional cooperation item should be considered in a separate one-day segment of the Council, preferably to be held immediately following the high-level segment.**[1] Such an arrangement would provide for an improved substantive interaction between the Council and the Executive Secretaries and would ensure a more effective review by the Council of the regional commissions' activities within the overall activities of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors. Moreover, in line with the guidance provided by the Council in its resolution 1998/46, annex III, this would also enable the Executive Secretaries, when feasible, to participate in the deliberations of the Council during its high-level segment, so as to provide the regional perspectives of their respective commissions on the specific global issues under consideration.

3. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs has recently considered more effective ways for strategic planning and coordination, in 10 thematic clusters. It is expected that these thematic groups will ensure coordination and cooperation at the planning stage between the regional commissions and relevant entities of the United Nations and that this joint approach will be fully reflected in the future work programmes and budgets of the regional commissions and the departments and offices concerned. The regional commissions are participating fully in this effort and are providing an essential regional dimension to the work of the Organization in the economic and social sectors. **The Council may wish to emphasize the role of the regional commissions as regional focal points for monitoring and assessing progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets of global conferences, as well as of the Millennium Development Goals, bearing in mind regional priorities.**[1]

4. In its resolution 1998/46, annex III, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the recommendation of the Secretary-General concerning the establishment of regional coordination meetings to be organized by the regional commissions. The initial experience has been that these meetings have led to some significant initiatives for coordination and cooperation with respect to activities of the United Nations system at the regional level. However, the Council may wish to consider

further measures that could be taken to reinvigorate these meetings as an effective tool for improved coherence of the economic and social activities of the United Nations system at the regional level, including holding them on a regular basis. **The Council may wish to request strengthened coordination between the regional commissions and United Nations entities and the specialized agencies with regional programmes, through the regional coordination meetings. Integrated follow-up to global conferences and the achievement of internationally agreed goals should be a recurrent item on the agenda of these meetings.**[1]

5. Additional issues of concern to the Council are raised in the report of the Executive Secretaries.

I. Report of the Executive Secretaries

6. The Executive Secretaries of the five regional commissions held five meetings among themselves during the period under review: in Geneva on 17 July 2003, in New York on 29 October 2003, in Geneva on 9 December 2003, in New York from 17 to 19 February 2004 and in Shanghai on 26 April 2004. The Executive Secretaries welcomed the invitation of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to exchange views and share in-depth analyses on the development policy issues and challenges facing their respective regions during a one-day meeting or seminar at the ECLAC secretariat, following their participation in UNCTAD XI.

7. These meetings were held in conjunction with the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, high-level United Nations meetings and summits or Senior Management Group meetings. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, in his capacity as convener of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, arranged for the meetings of the Committee to be held around the joint presence of the Executive Secretaries so as to ensure their participation, and also held a meeting with the Executive Secretaries on 12 December 2003.

8. At their meetings, the Executive Secretaries exchanged views on global issues and on the activities of their respective commissions which respond to the related development challenges within the regions. In particular, they exchanged views on the regional dimensions of the work of the United Nations.

9. With respect to mainstreaming the regional dimensions of the work of the United Nations, the Executive Secretaries noted that, as regional outposts of the Organization, the regional commissions undertook multisectoral activities for regional development and cooperation. Those activities included policy-oriented research and the provision of advice to their member States; technical cooperation and training activities for capacity-building; providing convening forums; and also providing reliable sources of comparable economic and social statistics. In particular, the lead role given to the commissions by various intergovernmental bodies for regional follow-up to world conferences and summits had further reinforced their work on indicators and benchmarking for linking the commitments agreed on in global conferences, as well as for monitoring and assessing their implementation at the regional level. In this context, the regional commissions are well placed to design, in cooperation with United Nations partners, a system for monitoring the regional dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals. In the

view of the Executive Secretaries, the work of the commissions in that regard should complement the activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in global monitoring and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Group in national monitoring. For example, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group Meeting on Millennium Development Goal Indicators held in New York from 29 March to 1 April 2004, expressed general agreement on the importance of providing regional synthesis on Millennium Development Goal achievements and challenges, based on existing and complementary goals and indicators. It recommended that agencies responsible for monitoring global targets should solicit inputs from the regional commissions on a systematic basis. Another example would be the joint initiative of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UNDP for assessing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the ESCAP region.

10. The Executive Secretaries reviewed the recent measures taken by the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs to involve the regional commissions more closely in the central policy work of the Secretariat. They agreed that under the guidance of the Committee, there should be an improved two-way flow of information between the global programmes, departments and offices and the regional commissions so that the regional perspective was more systematically reflected in policy discussions at Headquarters, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to ensure that functional linkages existed between activities undertaken at Headquarters and those undertaken by the regional commissions. Moreover, the regional commissions should be more closely involved in the preparation of the reports of the Secretary-General to global bodies. The thematic groups originally established by the Executive Committee in connection with the preparation of the programme budget for the 2004-2005 biennium should remain active in support of this objective. In the view of the Executive Secretaries, cooperation and joint work should be further pursued and clearly reflected in the work programme and budget of each of the regional commissions and the departments and offices concerned.

11. At the intergovernmental level, the Executive Secretaries were of the view that the regional cooperation item considered by the Economic and Social Council at its general segment should be considered at a separate segment on regional cooperation, devoted to the interface between the regional commissions and the Council. Such a segment, of one day's duration, could be held immediately after the high-level segment so as to ensure a more effective mainstreaming of the regional commissions' contributions to the overall policy work of the Council and so as to facilitate the provision by the commissions of regional perspectives on global issues under consideration. By the same token, the Council would be in a better position to assess the response of the regional commissions to its directives with respect to policy coherence in the economic and social sectors.

12. The Executive Secretaries further agreed on the need to hold yearly informal meetings at Headquarters to brief member delegations of their respective commissions on socio-economic policies, perspectives and outlooks in their respective regions. Such an initiative would also encourage a more effective two-way flow of information and substantive exchange, including on the findings of the Economic Surveys, thereby eliminating the need for their simultaneous launching at Headquarters. The practice of launching the Surveys at Headquarters limits the audience to representatives of the accredited media who, in any case, can access the

same information through their counterpart correspondents in the respective regions or networks.

13. In connection with the regional Economic Surveys, the Executive Secretaries exchanged views and experiences about the publications of their respective commissions, particularly flagship reports. They agreed on the need for future coordination in the area of statistical data featuring in global and regional flagship reports, an issue that was first raised in the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and supported by its members (see subsection II.A.1, below).

14. The Executive Secretaries exchanged views among themselves and with other members of the Senior Management Group on how to further strengthen coherence of United Nations activities at the regional level. This process should, as much as possible, take due account of the vantage position of the Regional Commissions in their respective regional institutional landscape and of their extensive multisectoral activities, which integrate topics in the economic, social and, at times, political spheres. In their view, the regional commissions, in their areas of competence, play a leading role within the United Nations in interactions with regional organizations. The regional commissions, for example, have been requested to play a lead role in the follow-up of the Monterrey Consensus at the regional level, with the support of regional and subregional banks and in cooperation with the funds and programmes of the United Nations. Major economic and social processes at the regional level, such as regional economic integration and free trade arrangements, are under way across the world. While the main thrust of those processes comes from specific regional or subregional intergovernmental organizations, it is important that the United Nations should play an advisory and supporting role for those processes, in a unified and coordinated way. In this regard, the Executive Secretaries are of the view that there should be a framework for cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, with the United Nations regional commissions having the lead role in these processes.

15. It is equally important that global entities such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as well as the newly established offices of the Special Representative for Africa and the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Countries and Small Island Developing Countries, when taking important initiatives in a particular region, fully involve the relevant regional commissions. For example, in preparation for the Almaty Conference on landlocked countries, the Office of the High Representative held discussions early on with the regional commissions and requested them to take the lead role in organizing the regional preparatory events. Similarly, efforts should be made to ensure that whenever a Government requests the assistance of the regional commissions on economic and social issues, the UNDP Resident Representative should also be involved early on so as to find avenues of efficient coordination in these matters.

16. Given its special development needs, Africa has taken up a greater share of the attention and work of the United Nations Development Group in recent years. The scale of the challenge in Africa has led most agencies to increase their support at the regional and subregional levels in the continent. In this regard, the main challenge now facing the United Nations in Africa is how to bring about enhanced coherence and coordination in its operations at all levels.

17. An efficient tool to achieve more coherence in United Nations activities at the regional level are the yearly coordination meetings between the regional commissions and the funds and programmes as well as United Nations departments and offices and agencies of the United Nations system engaged in regional and subregional activities, proposed by the Secretary-General and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 1998. These regional coordination meetings, which were launched in 1999 under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General are to be reactivated and convened annually at regional director level to decide on policy and programme issues. It might be beneficial to hold these group meetings back to back with the regional resident coordinator meetings, so that both mechanisms can review regional economic and social trends as well as technical cooperation at the regional level.

18. As the regional presence of the United Nations system grows, there is an increasing need to bring more coherence to the operational activities at the regional and subregional levels in order to enhance their impact. The Millennium Development Goals can readily serve as a framework for collaborative work in the regions. Within this framework, a few priority areas for collective action can be agreed upon, within which partnerships can be developed and division of labour and lead roles established with a view to achieving greater synergy and increased impact of the United Nations activities. The expertise of the commissions, as well as their special focus on cross-border and subregional issues, some of which cannot be effectively addressed solely through country-level coordination (for example, border crossing, trade facilitation, the water-energy nexus in Central Asia or the Mano River development initiative in Africa), calls for integrating, whenever appropriate, the regional and subregional dimensions of United Nations activities at the regional level. Closer links need to be established between the regional structures of the funds and programmes and the respective regional commissions, so as to take best advantage of the United Nations substantive and operational capacity available in each region. The strategic compact between the regional commissions and UNDP (July 2000) was an important first step on which partners need to build further. The Millennium Development Goals provide a sound basis for regional coordination and cooperation between the regional commissions and the United Nations Development Group.

19. The Executive Secretaries noted that the 2003 technical cooperation review, a follow-up to the Secretary-General's second set of reforms, found that the technical cooperation activities of the regional commissions in all areas served to complement their broader programme responsibilities and did not pose a significant issue of duplication with the technical cooperation activities carried out by the global entities. Nonetheless, as emphasized by the Deputy Secretary-General, there is room for clarification of roles, both within the United Nations system and vis-à-vis recipient and donor countries, as well as for achieving greater synergies, coherence and complementarity of efforts. The case for incorporating in-country programmes the regional and subregional dimensions of operational activities through greater involvement of the regional commissions by the resident coordinators was affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/201 in 2002. The operational activities of the commissions in regional and interregional cooperation should be further supported to respond to the Secretary-General's policy of decentralization and to the mandates of the General Assembly in this regard. Closer interaction between the

Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group would be very useful in this respect.

20. While all commissions are partners in country level operations under the United Nations resident coordinator system, some are more involved than others. The Executive Secretaries agreed that the regional commissions should align as much as possible their technical cooperation work within the framework of common country assessments/the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and poverty reduction strategy papers. To further support this approach, there should be strong two-way communication between the regional commissions and the resident coordinators/United Nations country teams, including flows of information on the commissions' country-level activities and on their available capacities. Expanding shared databases of national-level United Nations activities could greatly facilitate this task.

21. The Executive Secretaries further explored interregional and horizontal cooperation between the commissions in given areas. Building primarily on the experience gained through the meetings of the Executive Secretaries, cooperation among the commissions should be strengthened through knowledge-sharing and networking. Recent meetings of chiefs of transport and programme planning as well as the focal points for information and communication technologies and energy are excellent initiatives, which extend cooperation among the regional commissions to other common substantive areas of work.

22. The Executive Secretaries also exchanged views on and reviewed activities undertaken by the commissions during the period under review concerning: (a) regional follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development; (b) resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010, which is the theme for the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council for 2004; (c) follow-up to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the preparations for the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. They also reviewed the commissions' preparations for the first and second phases of the World Summit on the Information Society, in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, and for UNCTAD XI in Brazil in 2004.

23. With respect to follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development, the regional commissions' actions have mainly focused on analytical work promoting policy dialogue, capacity-building and sharing of best practices. The Executive Secretaries noted that regional follow-up actions, as articulated in the Monterrey Consensus, have led to consolidating partnerships between the regional commissions, regional development banks and other financial institutions that were forged in the preparatory process for the Monterrey conference. Taking advantage of their in-house multidisciplinary capacities, the regional commissions are also promoting an integrated approach in their activities, taking especially into account the results of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. Similarly, the activities of the regional commissions in the areas of trade and trade facilitation are highly relevant for the follow-up to the financing for development process. In order to assist their developing member countries to integrate effectively into the global trading system, the commissions have continued their work with other partners in formulating trade policies and strategies so as to take advantage of

the opportunities provided by globalization and liberalization. They helped countries prepare for the Fifth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held in Cancun in September 2003.

24. With respect to the least developed countries, out of the 50, as many as 34 are in the ECA region, with another 14 in the ESCAP region, and one in each of the ECLAC and ESCWA regions. The Executive Secretary of ECE pointed out that while not qualifying as least developed countries according to the United Nations definition, a number of ECE countries faced very similar economic and social problems to those countries and contained sizeable proportions of people living below the poverty line (using the World Bank definition of $2 per day). All the commissions, especially ECA and ESCAP, have undertaken considerable work in recent years, both analytical and operational, that is consistent with the theme of the high-level segment of the Council for 2004. The Executive Secretaries reviewed macroeconomic policies and the institutional framework, official development assistance, debt and progress towards achieving self-reliance, and trade issues, particularly the Doha Round. They noted that disparities in income were widening and there was a need to implement pro-poor growth policies that would generate employment and prevent a further widening of income disparities and a rise in poverty. An appropriate mix of fiscal, monetary and social policies was needed and that should be fully taken into account by IMF, the World Bank and other international financial institutions when formulating their conditionality. It was also necessary, in the view of the Executive Secretaries, to develop mechanisms to fund anti-cyclical policies to safeguard social investments as well as investment in infrastructure during adjustment periods in order to secure growth in the medium and long term. With respect to official development assistance, debt and progress towards achieving self-reliance, the Executive Secretaries noted that closely linked to aid was the issue of debt relief, especially for the least developed countries. With the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, finally some acknowledgement was apparent of the need to move from debt relief to debt cancellation. Further, it was necessary to secure ways to ensure sufficient funding for the implementation of the enhanced HIPC initiative in order to make sure that a disproportionate share of its cost was not borne indirectly by developing countries in the form of higher interest-rate spreads. Policy options to ensure new and additional funding to meet the substantial additional requirements of the least developed and other low-income countries were needed, in the light of their commitments deriving from the Millennium Development Goals. With respect to the Doha Round, regional policy dialogue, training and sharing of expertise were essential in order to strengthen the development dimensions of the Doha negotiations. The Executive Secretaries also emphasized the urgent need for widening the WTO accession process and for promoting national ownership of the accession process. In their view, regional and subregional organizations, including the regional commissions, needed to ensure policy coherence in close collaboration with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and other relevant United Nations agencies in their efforts to assist the least developed countries.

25. Following the decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its eleventh session, on the follow-up to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, inter alia providing mandates for regional follow-up and assigning a role to the regional commissions in that context, the Executive Secretaries exchanged views among

themselves on the ways and means of responding to those mandates within the available resources of their respective secretariats. They acknowledged the priority importance of regional follow-up to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Accordingly, they decided to make appropriate adjustments to the existing calendar of activities of their respective commissions in order to hold regional implementation meetings in compliance with the guidance provided by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session.

26. The regional implementation meetings carried out an overall regional review of the progress in implementation in the three thematic areas identified for consideration at the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, namely, water, sanitation and human settlements. The meetings identified constraints, opportunities and challenges facing the respective regions in these areas, while also providing opportunities for the exchange of experience and lessons learned. A common shortcoming made evident at the regional review meetings in the five regions is the grossly inadequate investment overall in the three thematic areas. Further, most of the investments made benefited the urban sector. Even so, in most developing countries, population migration from rural to urban areas continued to strain urban infrastructures. Contaminated drinking water and poor sanitation were having direct negative consequences for productivity and economic growth in those countries, thereby undermining their poverty alleviation initiatives. It was also notable that the lack of progress in many countries with regard to water quality was often due to inadequate water management. This highlighted the urgent need for capacity-building in those countries. Likewise, lack of education had an adverse impact on solving the sanitation crisis in many countries, because of the inability to change the behaviour of the population. The outcome of the regional implementation meetings directly fed into the preparations and substantive documentation for the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

27. The Executive Secretaries noted that, with respect to the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, the regional preparatory process had considerably raised awareness of the issues of bridging the digital divide and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a tool for development. In this context, the regional commissions, based on their expertise in specific areas, provided valuable platforms for general policy discussion and formulation. In the period ahead and in preparation for the second phase of the Summit in Tunis, topics for such discussion might include bridging gaps in access to and use of ICT, and supporting vulnerable groups, underdeveloped regions and subregions and local communities. One area in particular in which the regional commissions have common expertise relates to the development of statistical indicators. The Executive Secretaries agreed that the World Summit process brought into focus the need for cooperation among the relevant organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, to develop adequate methodology for measuring selected indicators as well as benchmarking and monitoring progress of implementation of the outcomes of the Summit. They emphasized the need for interregional cooperation as well as for horizontal cooperation among their respective secretariats in this area. They recommended information and communication technologies as the interregional theme for consideration by the Economic and Social Council in 2004 (see sect. IV.A below). They also identified ICT as an important area for a joint project by the commissions to be funded from the Development Account in the near future. Moreover, they agreed to participate in

a high-level panel, organized by ESCAP in connection with its sixtieth session in Shanghai, on "information and communication technology and knowledge-economy development: a regional perspective".

28. The Executive Secretaries also exchanged views among themselves and with the management of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the regional commissions' participation in UNCTAD XI. The Executive Secretaries will participate in a round-table discussion on "Bilateralism and regionalism in the aftermath of Cancun: re-establishing the primacy of multilateralism". In follow-up to the joint discussions, and in accordance with the guidance provided by the Executive Secretaries, the regional commissions, under the leadership of ESCAP, have prepared a joint paper reviewing some commonalities and differences among countries and groups of countries on the proceedings of the Doha Development Agenda and the multilateral trading system in general. It explores the trend towards the proliferation of regional and bilateral trade agreements, analyses their track record and their relationship with the multilateral trading system. The paper will also make suggestions as to what the regional commissions can do jointly and in cooperation with other partners to advance the multilateral trade agenda in a mutually supportive manner to WTO-consistent regional and bilateral trade agreements. The regional commissions and their partners, at both the regional and global levels, play an essential role in assisting developing countries in effectively negotiating and implementing multilateral, regional and bilateral trade and other economic partnership agreements. They can do so individually in their respective regions, but also jointly in cooperation with UNCTAD and other partners through interregional projects and programmes focusing on capacity-building in WTO-related areas, including services as an emerging area of competitiveness of developing countries in a globalized world. The commissions could also work together in exploring ways for regional and bilateral trade agreements to promote development effectively and to be WTO-consistent. Another area where there is scope to develop joint projects and programmes would be documenting best practices in trade and investment policies. Synergies with the Bretton Woods institutions and the regional development banks should also be sought, with the latter providing essential financial assistance to vulnerable countries to adjust to new patterns of competitiveness and build supply-side capacities to benefit from market access gains. In the view of the Executive Secretaries, the regional commissions should continue to work very closely with UNCTAD at the regional level so as to provide a coherent regional perspective to an issue of global concern.

29. The Executive Secretaries also noted that since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, their respective commissions had focused their programmes of work on better assisting member States' efforts to meet its commitments, especially those dealing with poverty, gender equity, environmental sustainability and, for ECA, the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Activities in all those areas had been focused on addressing one of the main challenges facing the regions in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, namely, the lack of sound, reliable and comparable statistical data, which were indispensable for analysing relevant information and for formulating and implementing policies to create an enabling environment in order to reach the relevant targets to the extent possible in the time frames agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration. The Executive Secretaries noted that conditions in the

regions varied; reaching some of the Millennium Development Goals, such as in education, might not be of direct relevance for countries of the ECLAC region, for example, since it would not represent a significant improvement in the living standards of their people. Work was necessary, therefore, to relate the Millennium Development Goals to regional conditions by fine-tuning and/or disaggregating each of the indicators or even defining complementary indicators.

30. The Executive Secretaries also expressed their appreciation for the report on the Millennium Development Goals, jointly prepared by ESCAP and UNDP and issued for the first time in June 2003.

II. Cooperation with organizations of the United Nations system

A. Cooperation at the global level

1. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

31. As indicated earlier in the present report, the Executive Secretaries participate actively in the meetings of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. During the period under review, the Committee took measures which should lead to closer involvement of the regional commissions in the central policy work of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors. With respect to the Millennium Development Goals, the Committee noted that it was essential to have follow-up, supported by reliable data and analysis at all levels: global, regional and national. The issue of global and country-level reporting had been extensively discussed; however, regional reporting which could serve as a very important reference for both country-level and global work needed to be pursued further. Each of the commissions had done extensive work on regional reporting and would present its experiences at a future meeting of the Committee. The Committee agreed to focus on a few concrete initiatives for joint collaboration. The *World Economic Situation and Prospects* report to be issued in 2004 by DESA would be prepared in close collaboration with the regional commissions and UNCTAD. A key venue for consultations in that respect was the Expert Group Meeting on the Global Economic Outlook, organized by the Department in November 2003. The Committee also agreed that the preparation of the report would progressively involve the regional commissions, which would provide comments on drafts that DESA would share with them, particularly the parts pertaining to their respective regions and the chapter on regional development and outlook.

32. With respect to the policy oversight of publications, common criteria would be developed jointly on such matters as relevance, quality control, marketing, co-publication and authorship that would draw on the lessons learned from the individual reviews of publications undertaken by ESCAP, ECLAC and other Committee members. The Committee also reviewed the UNDP knowledge management system for technical cooperation. The Committee considered ways to ensure that the knowledge and capacities of the global entities and the regional commissions could become an integral part of the existing system, so as to provide a fuller service to Member States. The system would also help to eliminate geographical distances and ensure that global and regional entities of the United Nations without separate country offices of their own could be more closely engaged

in national development efforts for the benefit of Member States. In linking their knowledge management systems, the Committee members recognized the importance of taking advantage of the comparative functional and geographical strengths of entities at each level, namely global secretariat entities, the regional commissions and the country networks of the resident coordinator system.

33. Finally, with respect to financing for development, the Committee welcomed General Assembly resolution 58/230, in which the Assembly invited the regional commissions, with the support of regional development banks, and in cooperation with the United Nations funds and programmes, to hold intergovernmental meetings to address the regional and interregional aspects of the follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development and thus help to bridge any gaps between the national, regional and interregional dimensions of the Monterrey Consensus and serve as inputs to the High Level Dialogue as well as to the spring meeting of the Economic and Social Council. The regional commissions would report back to the Committee as this request is implemented.

2. The United Nations Development Group

34. The regional commissions participate in the meetings of the United Nations Development Group. However, because of their absence at the country level, the opportunities for them to be involved with the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF) processes have remained somewhat limited to the countries of location of their respective secretariats and subregional offices, as in the case of ECA, ECLAC and ESCAP. Beyond that, their participation and involvement with CCA/UNDAF processes have been dependent on the initiative of the resident coordinators. For instance, UNDP and ECA have undertaken some joint activities at the national level in the context of the resident coordinator system and the CCA/UNDAF process in several countries of the region.

35. At the 30th meeting of the United Nations Development Group, held in Vienna on 1 April 2004, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA stressed that the Group's work around the Millennium Development Goals would be strengthened at the country level through closer collaboration with the regional commissions, which could bridge the gap between the global processes and country-level responses. The regional commissions could also facilitate the exchange of best practices on the CCA/UNDAF as well as poverty reduction strategy paper processes, as demonstrated by organization by the Economic Commission for Africa of PRSP review meetings at the regional level involving the PRSP countries, relevant donors and other stakeholders.

36. There was also potential for enhancing mutual cooperation between the relevant organizations by establishing linkages between the respective commissions and the newly created United Nations Development Group Executive Committee arrangement for periodic meetings of their Directors of Regional Bureaux (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP). So far, by invitation, only ECLAC had participated as an observer at two of the meetings of the Directors of Latin American Bureaux.

3. Cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

37. Joint activities have continued to be organized by the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in follow-up to global

conferences, in particular, regional follow-up to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation within the framework outlined by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh and twelfth sessions. In addition, ECA and DESA submitted reports on water, sanitation and human settlements to the regional ministerial meeting held in Addis Ababa in December 2003; ESCWA and DESA held a joint meeting on clean fuels and vehicles in Beirut in March 2004; and DESA provided a financial contribution for the preparation of key inputs for the ECLAC follow-up meeting to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in November 2003. Other ongoing collaborative activities include the substantive participation of the commissions in Project LINK (an international collaborative research group for econometric modelling, coordinated jointly by DESA and the University of Toronto); exchange of data and information in the preparation of global reports, such as *World Economic Situation and Social Prospects*; and on regional Economic and Social Surveys. Exchanges of specialized information in other areas of common interest have been accomplished through participation in each other's expert group meetings and training activities.

38. Additionally, the regional commissions have continued their close cooperation with DESA in a number of areas, predominantly in the area of statistics and Millennium Development Goal indicators, energy and sustainable development, population and gender equality.

4. Cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

39. The regional commissions and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) have continued their long-standing collaboration in the fields of trade and investment; however, emerging areas have been added to that collaboration, such as, the role of information and communication technologies in promoting trade, and the links between trade and sustainable development. Building on their cooperation in the preparatory activities carried out for the first phase of the World Summit for the Information Society, they have started mutual cooperation since then on the issue of information and communication technologies indicators. In addition, most of the commissions and UNCTAD have collaborated on providing technical assistance to Member States in facilitating their accession to WTO and on assisting them to participate effectively in the multilateral trading system, including the Doha Development Round negotiations. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the regional commissions and UNCTAD cooperated in organizing a panel discussion on the regional dimension of trade and development concerns on the sidelines of UNCTAD XI, held in Sao Paolo. The commissions have a well-established collaboration with UNCTAD through exchanging trade and investment related information, regularly participating in each other's meetings, seminars and forums, and contributing to each other's projects and publications.

5. Cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme

40. Despite the fact that cooperation between the regional commissions and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been somewhat limited in recent years, primarily owing to funding constraints, there has also been increasing promise of developing further cooperation along certain thematic lines. Their shared commitment to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and follow-up to global United Nations conferences and summits has led to some cooperation between the regional commissions and the respective regional bureaux

of UNDP on specific thematic clusters of the Millennium Development Goals — especially on statistics and indicators on poverty eradication, and sustainable development.

41. With regard to activities related to the Millennium Development Goals, ECE and UNDP continued their collaboration on improving the production and use of official statistics to measure human development and the achievement of the Goals. Funding from UNDP training by ECE of analysts from Central and Eastern European as well as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries on the use of human development and Millennium Development Goal indicators, and further activities were carried out to assess the availability and use of gender statistics in Central and Eastern European and CIS countries.

42. In the case of ESCAP, Millennium Development Goal-related cooperation has become more institutionalized. The UNDP-ESCAP project "Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific (Phase I)" led to the publication of the first-ever regional Millennium Development Goal progress report in mid-2003. The recently launched phase II of this joint project (2004-2006) is intended to build upon the success of the first phase by broadening collaboration with United Nations and other interested agencies and creating synergies with further Millennium Development Goal-related initiatives. The project complements another new joint UNDP-ESCAP project on building national capacity in statistics to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals, to be implemented by the ESCAP Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, located in Tokyo.

43. For ECLAC, cooperation on the Millennium Development Goals has involved other partners in the framework of a joint ECLAC/UNDP/Inter-American Development Bank/World Bank initiative to address the lack of reliable and comparable statistical data aimed at meeting the Millennium Development Goals; in this respect two pilot projects are being carried out in Colombia and Peru. In addition, ECLAC and UNDP have continued exchanging views and information on issues of common interest, in particular issues relating to the linkages between macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction.

44. ECA collaboration with UNDP focuses mainly on capacity-building activities in support of national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These include national programmes for promoting sustainable development; support for macroeconomic and social reforms for capacity-building for pro-poor policies; and support in engendering macroeconomic policies and in the preparation of reports on the Millennium Development Goals.

45. ESCWA and UNDP held a joint workshop on social indicators with emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals in Beirut in June 2003, with the aim of raising awareness of the Millennium Development Goals and identifying means to track and monitor progress towards achieving them.

Follow-up to global conferences and summits

46. Work in follow-up to global conferences and summits has led the regional commissions and UNDP to undertake analytical work in some cases and to deliver technical cooperation in certain other cases. Within the framework of the joint project "Financing for sustainable development", ECLAC and UNDP joined efforts

with the Government of Mexico and the Andean Development Corporation to issue, in April 2003, a joint publication entitled *Financing for Sustainable Development. Visions and Proposals for Action from a Latin American and Caribbean Perspective.* In August 2003, the two institutions organized a methodological workshop on environmental expenditure and investment, aimed at promoting the use of uniform and comparable methodologies to quantify and classify public and private environmental expenditure and investment, in order to help decision makers design funding strategies for environmental purposes.

47. In the context of facilitating preparations by the developing countries for the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations, UNDP participated in and made substantive contributions to the ECA Post-Cancun Expert Group Meeting for African Trade Negotiators and Officials, held in Accra, Ghana, in November 2003 with the aim of reviving the stalled Doha process and charting a way forward for Africa. UNDP also provided financial support to ECA in organizing the High-Level Brainstorming Meeting of African Trade Negotiators, held in Mauritius in June 2003.

B. Cooperation at the regional level

1. Regional coordination meetings

48. In its resolution 1998/46, annex III, the Economic and Social Council requested yearly interagency coordination meetings, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and organized by the regional commissions. The objective of these meetings is to achieve greater coherence and synergies among the activities of the United Nations system at the regional level. These meetings are focused on providing coordinated support for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the commitments of international conferences and summits at the regional level. They also reflect concern with regional-specific issues, such as the implementation of NEPAD in the ECA region, HIV/AIDS and disability-related concerns in the ESCAP region, and peace-building and reconstruction in the ESCWA region. However, these mechanisms should be more fully utilized in the development of a strategy for system-wide support for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and other international commitments. It is planned to reactivate the regional coordination meetings as a matter of priority during 2004; one of the main areas of focus will be the enhancement of joint technical cooperation at the regional and subregional levels with the relevant organizations of the United Nations system.

49. The activities of these meetings during the period under review are briefly described below.

Economic Commission for Europe

50. The regional coordination meeting organized at the end of 2002 by ECE with the participation of 13 other United Nations organizations and agencies discussed the work programmes for 2004-2005. This was considered as a necessary first step towards a more in-depth consideration of how entities could better cooperate in the region.

51. Given the active involvement of most participating agencies in the Central Asian, Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe subregions, as well as the significant development challenges the concerned countries are confronting, it is expected that the next meeting, to be held in the second half of 2004, will concentrate on the strategies of the organizations in respect of these subregions and how the work being carried out can be better coordinated. Lack of coordination can reduce the efficiency of assistance and places an additional burden on recipient countries.

52. In the face of the enlargement of the European Union, it is all the more important that the countries concerned receive effective assistance so that new dividing lines in Europe between the "haves" and the "have nots" can be avoided. Some of these countries, while not formally classified as developing or least developed countries, face very similar economic and social problems, with many of their inhabitants living below the poverty line of $2 a day. Income disparities are widening. At the same time, problems in some of the subregions can contribute to political instability, an example being water management in Central Asia.

53. Against this backdrop, cooperation and coordination are critical. However, an additional important issue to be tackled at the next meeting would be working out the modalities for inter-agency coordination to be achieved at minimum cost. This question is key, since coordination does not just happen because it is acknowledged as necessary.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

54. The heads-of-agency meetings/regional coordination meetings organized by ESCAP were held every quarter, chaired jointly by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for Thailand, and attended by representatives of regional, subregional and country offices of the United Nations system. In the context of these meetings, 11 thematic working groups consider specific issues, ranging from the Millennium Development Goals, women's empowerment and gender equality, disability-related concerns and environment and development, to information and communication technologies, poverty reduction and food security. There exist two committees: on programme coordination and on administrative and management matters. These mechanisms are intended to ensure system-wide coherence and greater synergies in United Nations regional responses and contribute to preventing possible duplication of work. Furthermore, they have been crucial in fostering partnership among the United Nations agencies and building a sense of collective United Nations identity and purpose.

55. The heads-of-agency meetings/regional coordination meetings continued to place strong emphasis on addressing substantive issues of common concern to the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as regional follow-up to the commitments of world conferences. The thematic focus of these meetings in 2003 and the first quarter of 2004 included regional priorities and strategies in the areas of education, drugs and crime, the environment, and hunger and food security. Important issues such as regional follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva phase), and common country assessments/United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks were also addressed.

56. One of the most notable examples of effective United Nations partnership has been the joint initiative between ESCAP and UNDP in preparing the regional

Millennium Development Goal reports, of which the first was issued in June 2003 and widely distributed in the region. ESCAP has been collaborating closely with other United Nations agencies in the areas of HIV/AIDS and disability, and in making regional preparations for the Geneva and Tunis phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). ESCAP has entered into institutional collaborative arrangements, such as memorandums of understanding, with other agencies and affiliated bodies, such as the World Meteorological Organization and the Asian Development Bank.

57. Staff training courses on report writing, rights-based approaches to development and HIV/AIDS awareness were provided to United Nations system staff based in Bangkok and were well attended.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

58. The fourth regional inter-agency coordination meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, which could not take place during 2003, will be held in the second half of 2004, with an agenda focused on three issues: (a) cooperation initiatives among various entities to optimize the work of the Organization in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals; (b) regional follow-up activities to United Nations summits and conferences in the socio-economic area; and (c) regional technical cooperation activities in the socio-economic area.

59. Building on the successful experience of the ECLAC web site on regional follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits, designed as a contribution to inter-agency coordination, ECLAC is currently developing an institutional web site for the regional follow-up of Millennium Development Goals, which, in addition to portraying the interdivisional work regarding the Millennium Development Goals carried out by ECLAC, will allow the dissemination of the links of other United Nations and regional agencies in this regard. Both tools will facilitate the exchange of information required for improving inter-agency coordination, as well as the dissemination of information on the work carried out by the United Nations in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

60. ECLAC has continued to promote inter-agency coordination, particularly in the areas of the advancement of women and of ageing.

61. An important development that would contribute to the further strengthening of regional coordination is the official inclusion of ECLAC in the meetings of the United Nations Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Economic Commission for Africa

62. The sixth regional consultations meeting of the United Nations system in support of NEPAD will be held on 8 and 9 July 2004, back-to-back with the African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa. Five clusters are being worked on: 1. infrastructure development, including water and sanitation, energy, transport and information and communication technologies (ICT) (convener: ECA); 2. governance, peace and security (convener: UNDP); 3. agriculture, trade and market access (convener: FAO); 4. environment, population and urbanization (convener: UN-Habitat); 5. human resource development, employment and HIV/AIDS (convener: UNICEF). In addition, as agreed at the fifth regional consultations meeting, a new sixth cluster on science and technology

(convener: UNESCO and UNCTAD) was recently established to support the work of NEPAD in this important area. Although the cluster is yet to be convened, it is already working closely with the NEPAD secretariat and other regional organizations on policy and implementation issues relating to NEPAD.

63. Considerable progress has been made by some of the clusters in identifying areas of common concern in their work where significant synergies can be built, and in working with African regional and subregional organizations within the context of the Regional Consultations mechanism.

64. Under "Infrastructure development", the water and sanitation sub-cluster organized a Pan African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water in Addis Ababa from 8 to 13 December 2003. The transport sub-cluster continues to assist, in collaboration with the World Bank, in the implementation of the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme, within the context of NEPAD. For instance, ECA, in collaboration with the regional economic communities and AU, is championing the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision on air transport liberalization in Africa. The ICT sub-cluster convened in September 2003 to discuss the involvement of the United Nations agencies working in Africa relative to the implementation of the Short-Term Action Plan on Infrastructure. It also organized and participated in several forums in preparation for the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

65. With respect to the human resources development cluster, the first joint meeting with the NEPAD-AU human resources development cluster was convened by UNICEF and the NEPAD secretariat on 29 and 30 January 2004. The purpose of the meeting was to review progress on an agreed-upon plan of action. Some of the major achievements of the work on HIV/AIDS include the special initiative of all the United Nations agencies in southern Africa in establishing the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Support Office, for the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa which has emerged as an important forum and coordinating mechanism for addressing a number of key issues, notably the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural livelihood and food security. The sub-cluster on education, which involved a collaborative effort of UNESCO, other participating United Nations agencies and NEPAD, is forming a task-team to review and finalize the NEPAD initial plan of action in the field of education. Collective activities of the employment sub-cluster have focused on the preparation by ILO and the NEPAD and AU secretariats of the draft social policy framework for Africa, which will serve as a core document for the Summit on Poverty and Employment in Africa, scheduled to take place in Burkina Faso in September 2004.

66. The activities of the environment, population and urbanization cluster have focused on shaping the sustainable NEPAD cities programme. They are being led by UN-HABITAT, in collaboration and consultation with other United Nations agencies operating in the same cities, the regional economic communities, national Governments and the NEPAD secretariat. The cluster made significant contributions in the area of environment, with UNEP leading the efforts by convening thematic workshops that resulted in project proposals that were incorporated in the NEPAD Environment Initiative Action Plan. UNEP also provided institutional support for the establishment of the interim secretariat of the NEPAD Environment Initiative.

67. The governance, peace and security cluster collaborated in organizing stakeholder workshops of parliamentarians, ministers and representatives of civil society from the 16 countries involved in the preparation of the African peer review.

68. Yet, in spite of the progress made, much remains to be done to enhance the coherence and the coordination of United Nations system support of NEPAD. For example, the thematic clusters identified several areas where synergies can be built on in the various work programmes. Follow-up action on this is needed. Cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender and human rights also need to be mainstreamed into the cluster activities. In addition, all United Nations agencies and organizations agreed on the growing need for the United Nations system to assist in strengthening the capacities of the regional economic communities, the AU Commission and the NEPAD secretariat. However, the resources available for doing this remain grossly inadequate. Finally, the regional consultation mechanism itself needs to further clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies operating at the regional and subregional levels in Africa, in order to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

69. The seventh and eighth meetings of the Regional Coordination Group in Western Asia convened by ESCWA were held on 29 and 30 May 2003 and 19 and 20 November 2003, respectively.

70. The deliberations of the seventh meeting resulted in the following conclusions: (a) there is a need to undertake joint activities to strengthen the capacities of NGOs and human rights institutions to monitor the implementation of human rights treaties in the Arab countries; (b) on peace-building, recovery and human development, it was agreed that United Nations agencies need to react quickly to developments in an unstable region and to prepare themselves in a creative manner so as to support the process of reconstruction. Pilot projects could be a pull factor in galvanizing Governments into action, as was the case in the demining operation in south Lebanon; (c) it was agreed to explore mechanisms for cooperation in the priority areas identified for collaborative action, namely social policies, poverty and employment; and (d) the newly established Regional Coordination Group web site was considered to be a useful mechanism for facilitating information sharing, coordination and cooperation among agencies.

71. During the eighth meeting, key areas such as the implementation of Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction and employment, social policies, human rights, world trade issues, and peace-building and recovery were discussed. The difficult circumstances facing the Arab region had laid additional responsibilities on the United Nations agencies but, at the same time, had offered them a significant opportunity to play an important role in the reconstruction, human development and peace-building efforts and had highlighted the need for a common United Nations policy stand with regard to the challenges faced in the region.

72. The meeting also stressed the need for coordination and collaboration among the United Nations agencies, based on the comparative advantage of each agency, and the establishment of a task force in support of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and other priority needs in the region was considered.

73. The Regional Coordination Group web site set up by ESCWA as a knowledge sharing and coordination network was acknowledged with appreciation.

2. Cooperation with other regional organizations

74. The regional commissions, being an integral part of the landscape of regional organizations in their respective regions and having helped establish and nurture some of them in the economic and social fields, enjoy a built-in advantage and a lead role in promoting and supporting regional and subregional integration and cooperation groupings. Additionally, being the principal arm of the United Nations in the economic and social fields in their respective regions, while also providing a neutral region-wide forum, the commissions are well placed to promote mutuality and complementarity between the global, regional and subregional processes. They have been instrumental in facilitating cooperation and the exchange of experience between the subregional organizations and integration groupings, as in the case of ESCAP, which for years has organized annual meetings of heads of subregional organizations in the region and has served as the secretariat of this arrangement. Moreover, the regional commissions' proximity to the theatres of regional and subregional action has enabled them to render timely and relevant services. For instance, in the context of the enlargement of the European Union, ECE has been assisting the newly acceding countries by organizing a series of "beyond enlargement" workshops, while also extending support to the remaining countries to catch up with the codes and standards of the European integration process.

75. In many cases, cooperation between the regional commissions and the regional and subregional organizations in their respective regions has been institutionalized through the signing of appropriate agreements or memorandums of understanding. ECE has agreements with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Central European Initiative, Commonwealth of Independent States, and the South-East European Cooperative Initiative/Stability Pact. All of these formal arrangements are being implemented by the respective organizations and ECE. In the case of ESCAP, a joint memorandum of understanding between the Asian Development Bank, WTO and ESCAP is currently under negotiation. In Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC has been working with the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Development Bank in the framework of the Tripartite Committee which provides technical support to the establishment of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. ECA continued its long-standing relationship with the Organization of African Unity by providing support in various aspects of the organization's transformation into the African Union (AU), including, in particular, the implementation of NEPAD and in promoting regional economic integration. Further, during the period under review, ECA and the African Development Bank underscored their long-standing cooperation by undertaking joint activities in several areas, for example, trade policy, implementation of the NEPAD programme on infrastructure, including the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision on air transport liberalization in Africa, and in the context of the ECA project on measuring progress towards good governance in Africa. Equally important, since June 2003, the two organizations have worked together to ensure synergies in preparing for the annual meetings of their respective policy organs by scheduling them back to back and organizing a joint symposium in conjunction with these meetings. ECA, through its subregional offices, also maintains very close cooperation with African subregional organizations, such as the Maghreb Arab

Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of Western African States and the Community of Sahel and Sahara States. Likewise, the ESCAP Pacific Operation Centre is an integral part of the institutional landscape in the Pacific region.

76. ESCWA, through a variety of institutional arrangements, cooperates with the League of Arab States. For instance, it acts as the technical secretariat for the Council of Ministers responsible for Environment. Moreover, its Executive Secretary co-chairs the biennial consultations between the League and the United Nations in the economic and social fields.

77. A wide variety of activities, both operational and analytical, are undertaken by the commissions and their regional/subregional integration grouping partners. The contributions of the regional commissions in terms of their policy analysis work are also significant for the strengthening of regional/interregional cooperation and integration arrangements and are often of a forward-looking nature. For instance, ECLAC has been deploying considerable efforts to expand and strengthen collaboration and coordination with other regional organizations, with the aim of assisting member States in the assessment of key analytical and policy issues associated with the proliferation of regional, subregional and bilateral trade agreements in the region; in the implementation of commitments assumed in the various agreements to which countries are signatories; and in strengthening their capacity to adapt to the new international environment, including the design of policies in open economies for improving competitiveness. At the request of the secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States, ECLAC has also prepared an analysis of "Main trade trends: trade policy and integration in the Greater Caribbean". In the Arab region, ESCWA envisages greater cooperation with the League of Arab States on its annual flagship publication on globalization and regional integration.

78. There is a need to strengthen the relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions, the regional and subregional development banks and other financial institutions and the United Nations on some key issues, such as trade and financing, at the regional and subregional levels. The regional commissions can play an important role in this regard. For instance, the importance of free trade agreements at the regional and subregional levels is quite evident. Given the current weakness of the multilateral system on trade issues, these agreements will become the cornerstone of trade developments in the years to come. Furthermore, most of these agreements go beyond trade issues and involve macroeconomic as well as governance issues. The regional commissions can play a leading role in relations between the United Nations and the relevant regional and subregional organizations in the follow-up of these agreements, particularly in linking them to the multilateral processes within the United Nations system.

79. The same applies to the relationship with the regional and subregional development banks, which are very important in the regions; and, moreover, in some of the regions, with a network of multilateral financial institutions. The regional commissions can play a leading role in the follow-up of the Monterrey Consensus at the regional and subregional levels in close interaction with regional and subregional development banks and other financial institutions as called for in General Assembly resolution 58/230. Also, integration from a physical perspective through infrastructural development of regional infrastructures and their

improvement for regional integration is yet another important regional and subregional issue, where the regional commissions, the regional and subregional development banks and the Bretton Woods institutions can play a more complementary role, building upon existing cooperation in this area.

III. Significant substantive issues before the commissions' sessions in 2004 or issues with which the commissions have been seized during the period under review

80. As indicated below, substantive themes or issues considered at the commissions' sessions or focused on by the respective secretariats primarily revolved around the challenges of globalization and the need to strengthen the production sectors and regional integration processes as effective vehicles for enabling countries to benefit from globalization. ESCWA has also focused on the development needs of a region under crisis conditions.

Economic Commission for Europe

81. At its fifty-ninth session, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe discussed: (i) short-term economic developments, (ii) policies to stimulate competitiveness and growth, (iii) the role and place of ECE in the new European architecture after the EU enlargement, and (iv) the relationship between the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and ECE.

82. On the basis of the Economic Survey of Europe 2004, No. 1, it was noted that growth had picked up in Eastern Europe, while the CIS was among the most dynamic regions in the world. The outlook for 2004 is generally optimistic, although considerable downside risks remain, notably persistent current account imbalances in the United States and associated risks of excessive exchange rate volatility.

83. The discussion on policies to stimulate competitiveness and growth was organized around two round tables. The first identified best practices and national policies that have proved successful in increasing competitiveness and growth; while the second focused on regional initiatives and cooperation in the ECE region and the role of the ECE in stimulating competitiveness. Conclusions drawn from the first round table include the following: Governments are primarily responsible for creating an economic environment that would be conducive to competitiveness and growth; Governments' targeted policies such as investments in education, research and development and information and communication technologies are also indispensable; government funding should be focused on areas where social returns exceed private returns and therefore private funding would be inadequate; a competitive economy needs entrepreneurship and therefore it is important to lower the costs of doing business, to cut "red tape" and to improve the efficiency of government services for enterprises; and the experience suggests that it is important to encourage the private sector to invest in research and development. The round table also concluded that substantial differences in the implementation of policies exist within the region.

84. The conclusions of the second round table include the following: regional cooperation can play an important role in fostering competitiveness and growth; regional initiatives should include a focus on competitiveness among their priorities

and, in order to be effective, these priorities have to be translated into clear operative targets that can be monitored. Currently, there is still a lack of efficient mechanisms for implementation of operative targets; and regional initiatives should make sure to involve all relevant stakeholders including central and local governments and the business and academic communities.

85. The discussion also emphasized such issues as the role of regional organizations like ECE, which could provide a forum for the exchange of best practices in such areas as entrepreneurship, trade facilitation, information and communication technologies and the information society. ECE had been active in promoting competitiveness and growth by promoting regional free trade, developing efficient infrastructure in transport and energy, encouraging transition to a knowledge-based economy and by providing a forum for discussion and the exchange of best practices. ECE also offered technical assistance, notably in meeting the new challenges posed by the advance of the knowledge-driven economy.

86. With respect to the enlargement of the European Union, the role of ECE was acknowledged in assisting the new member States move towards EU membership, as well as in providing advice and support to the EU candidate countries and to other countries with economies in transition. At the same time, it was noted that developments in the region pose challenges for ECE, and the secretariat's willingness to face those challenges was welcomed.

87. The Commission requested a report on ECE with the aim of developing recommendations to determine what changes to the role, mandate and functions of ECE are necessary in the light of the changes in the European institutional architecture since ECE was created almost 60 years ago. The report, which will be paid for out of extrabudgetary resources, will be considered at the sixtieth session of the Commission.

88. With regard to the long-standing cooperation of ECE with OSCE, it was recalled that the 1997 reform of ECE had emphasized the need to consolidate cooperation with organizations such as OSCE which have a similar membership and a complementary mandate. The privileged position of the Economic Commission for Europe among all the organizations with which OSCE cooperated was also highlighted. At the same time, while the New Strategy Document of OSCE, adopted in 2003, provided the basis for a new and deeper relationship between OSCE and ECE, the relationship had still to be defined. The Commission therefore agreed to the proposal of the Executive Secretary, that an intersecretariat task force prepare a detailed plan, including resource implications in respect of the proposed "new" cooperation, that would be subsequently submitted to the Commission for its consideration and decision. The Commission further agreed to the involvement of ECE in the transitional review of commitments in preparation for the OSCE Economic Forum in June 2004 in the same manner as had been the case so far.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

89. The sixtieth commemorative session of ESCAP was hosted by the Government of the People's Republic of China in Shanghai from 22 to 26 April 2004. The theme topic of the session was "Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation". The fundamental vision of the United Nations Millennium Declaration is that better management of globalization

is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Globalization has been a complex and uneven process for the Asian and Pacific region. Several countries have reaped substantial benefits, but many others, particularly the least developed, have been left behind. Regional development cooperation in trade, transport, information and communication technologies and finance is an effective vehicle for enabling Asian and Pacific countries to benefit equitably from globalization. The study on the theme topic presents the salient features of the analysis of selected regional cooperation agreements in the above four areas to identify ways in which Asian and Pacific countries can achieve this objective.

90. The analysis identified three layers of Asian and Pacific cooperation, intergovernmental rules-based, activities-based and transnational corporation-driven, which are part of globalization and promote incremental integration through public-private partnership. The study lists a number of areas which require further regional cooperation. Examples are harmonizing the "spaghetti bowl" of bilateral and regional trade arrangements, making the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway the main international trunk routes of the region, harnessing the region's world-class expertise in ICT to bridge the digital divide between countries and establishing a strong, safe and efficient financial architecture to support economic development. The specific role of ESCAP in promoting regional cooperation in the above areas was emphasized.

91. Two main issues were identified by the Commission: (a) how to assist those countries and vulnerable groups that had not benefited from globalization; and (b) the quest for a framework of global governance. In the absence of global governance, regional cooperation could serve as an effective mechanism for combining forces to tackle transnational problems, to assist those countries that were unable to cope with globalization problems on their own and to spread the benefits and costs of globalization more equitably. Regional cooperation would also enhance policy coordination among diverse countries and areas, strengthen their risk preparedness and help to foster a more favourable environment for comprehensive development in the region.

92. The Commission noted that the growth of intraregional trade accounted for a substantial share of the overall trade growth of the economies of the region. In that context, the establishment of regional, subregional and bilateral economic cooperation and integration initiatives could further promote trade. ESCAP was called on to explore ways of making such arrangements serve as building blocks of the multilateral trading system. ESCAP was requested to accord high priority to formulating a comprehensive region-wide trade cooperation framework.

93. Cooperation among the member countries and ESCAP has achieved a significant milestone in the coordinated development of highways in Asia, as well as between Asia and Europe, with the formulation of an intergovernmental agreement on the Asian Highway network. ESCAP has been negotiating routes and road specifications for the network since 1992. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network was signed by 23 member countries of ESCAP during the sixtieth session of the Commission (Shanghai, 26 April 2004) and will remain open for signature at United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 1 May 2004 to 31 December 2005.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

94. In preparation for the thirtieth session of the Commission and the ninth session of the Regional Conference on Women, ECLAC has been seized with two main substantive issues: productive development policies in open economies; and continuity, changes and emerging phenomena in the sociodemographic context.

95. The report prepared for the thirtieth session of the Commission (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 28 June-2 July 2004), analyses the historical patterns of growth in the region in relation to the restructuring of production sectors resulting from the profound reforms that have taken place, mainly increasingly open trade and liberalization of domestic financial markets and external capital flows.

96. The region has clearly made major advances, but it also continues to grapple with major difficulties. Greater control over internal macroeconomic disequilibrium, higher rates of export growth and the region's success in positioning itself as a major target for foreign direct investment are some of the more noteworthy achievements. Progress as regards economic growth, productivity and external vulnerability, however, has been frustratingly slow. The rates of growth not only remained low, but experienced significant fluctuations. Production linkages with dynamic activities are weak, and the increasing use of imported intermediate and capital goods by integrated production systems has undermined production chains and national innovation systems. As a result, the productivity gap with the developed world has not been reduced, and indeed grew wider in many countries and sectors.

97. From this critical analysis of the productive development policies implemented during the economic liberalization process of recent decades, it can be concluded that the region needs a medium- and long-term vision capable of guiding the efforts to strengthen production sectors in order to optimize its linkages with the global economy. In this regard the report puts forward some elements for achieving fuller integration into the global economy and returning to historical economic growth rates while ensuring greater social cohesion in the countries of the region. The core proposals include introducing more technology and know-how into all production chains and at the same time improving systemic competitiveness based on three fundamental pillars: the creation of innovation systems to speed up the accumulation of technological capacities; support for new productive activities and the formation of production linkages; and the provision of quality infrastructure services. Progress on all these fronts requires innovative public-private partnerships, based on shared strategic visions.

98. In preparation of the Commission session, the ECLAC sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development held an open-ended meeting of its presiding officers in March 2004. For this meeting, ECLAC prepared a document analysing the sociodemographic context in which countries of the region have been implementing the Programme of Action of the Regional Conference on Population and Development, which presents clear features of continuity, change and emerging phenomena.

99. A downward trend in the rate of population growth has gained strength in the region since the 1980s and because of the pattern and extent of the decrease in mortality and fertility rates, the ageing of the population, which was already evident in some countries in the 1980s, has become more accentuated and generalized in the

region, although most of the countries still have a relatively youthful structure. Even so, the sustained increase in the proportion of the working-age population has taken place at the expense of the relative size of the under-15 age group, resulting in a decline of the total dependency ratio in most countries. These trends underpin the notion of a "demographic bonus", a historic opportunity which manifests itself during the period in which the working-age population, measured as a percentage of the total population, reaches its peak. The resulting decrease in the dependency ratio translates into a reduction in the pressure on basic social services, such as education and mother and child health care. However, the dividends from this "bonus" are neither automatic nor easy, since it implies the reallocation of resources freed from social sectors — which might still need those resources for quality improvements — towards employment generation activities for the growing working-age population. Furthermore, owing to the heterogeneity of the demographic transition in the region, there are countries in which the "bonus" is now in its last stages and other countries in which it has yet to become evident.

100. International migration in the region has traditionally followed three patterns: extraregional immigration, which has been steadily decreasing; intraregional migration, whose intensity has also tended to decline over the past few decades; and extraregional migration, especially to the United States. However, a new pattern emerged during the 1990s, making Latin America the developing region with the highest proportion of emigrant women. Latin America continues to be the most urbanized region in the developing world; however, despite the rise in the value of commodities being produced for the international market, rural areas continue to exhibit clear lags in social indicators.

Economic Commission for Africa

101. The thirty-seventh session of the Commission, held in Kampala, Uganda from 21 to 22 May 2004, was convened under the theme "Mainstreaming trade policy in national development strategies". As was the case last year, the 2004 session was held consecutively with the annual meetings of the African Development Bank Group at the same venue. Building on last year's successful approach, this year's joint African Development Bank/ECA symposium focused on the theme "Gender, growth and sustainable development".

102. The failure of the Cancun WTO Ministerial Meeting on 14 September 2003 to reach consensus on modalities for negotiations on rich country agricultural trade barriers, export subsidies and domestic support policies has put Africa's relationship with the world trading system at a critical crossroad. African countries were important players in the negotiations at Cancun and must now chart a way forward based on a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities and challenges offered by the global and regional trading systems. Dismantling market distorting agricultural subsidies will require Africa to speak with a unified voice in WTO.

103. The virtues of free trade are now well known and widely accepted — African countries would be poorer if they turned their backs on world markets. Yet, it is bad economics to pretend that free trade is good for everyone, all the time. The reality is that trade often produces losers as well as winners. The accelerated pace of globalization means many economies will see more losers as well as winners. The Commission addressed such issues as what kind of social safety nets can best protect the losers from trade liberalization in the African context; what is the appropriate

fiscal response to declining trade taxes as African countries integrate into the regional and global markets; how can African countries improve their trade competitiveness; and what should African countries do to speed up export diversification to counter the downward trend in commodities.

104. Designing the appropriate policy response to these issues is a complex matter and will depend on country-specific circumstances. However, what is clear is that trade issues need to be better integrated into national development strategies. Ministers of finance and planning play a critical role in ensuring the coherence of overall development strategies. But often trade policy issues are not accorded the prominence they deserve. Fiscal policies often clash with the desire to create a vibrant export sector. Monetary policy may often be too tight to support the long-term viability infant industries. Regional integration agreements may wipe out entire sectors of an economy. Education and human development policies may not be conducive to creating a strong labour force. The issues of mainstreaming trade in national development strategies is an inter-ministerial one, touching on diverse governmental responsibilities and programmes. Acquiring deeper understanding of how trade policies can complement and reinforce policy actions across the board is an important step in achieving enhanced development results. Creating coherence in national development strategies will require the leadership of ministers of finance and planning, working closely with the ministers of trade.

105. African regional integration would stimulate diversification and closer integration into global markets. Although intra-African trade remains a small part of Africa's total trade, an integrated market offers the continent the best means to build up its manufacturing sector and to diversify its economy from primary products. Central to this integration scheme is fostering intra-African trade and unifying regional markets by removing trade barriers. However, success requires progress in improving infrastructure, particularly transport and communication as well as rationalization of many of the regional economic communities.

106. Another salient issue considered at the session was the outcome of the external review of the work of ECA, which had been requested by the Commission at its previous session.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

107. ESCWA has been seized during the period under review with two important issues: (a) the region's instability and the serious repercussions of the situation in Iraq and Palestine; and (b) the complexity of the globalization process and the opportunities and challenges it poses for the region.

108. ESCWA took strategic initiatives to respond to the needs of the countries emerging from conflict, namely, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. It promoted brainstorming and dialogue on policies and strategies to be pursued in Iraq and possible courses of action to be followed. The Task Force on Iraq monitored the situation there, explored and examined approaches to manage the region's development under crisis conditions, analysed impacts and published this material on a dedicated web site. Regional specialists were convened to examine and extensively explore economic and social reconstruction issues. Other activities on Iraq included the establishment and development of a roster of Iraqi experts in various fields.

109. Similarly, ESCWA supported advocacy and policy dialogue on the rehabilitation and development of the Palestinian territories. ESCWA started a process that includes several meetings and workshops to mobilize Arab support for rehabilitation and development and that will culminate in an international Arab forum on socio-economic rehabilitation in the Palestinian territories (September 2004). A number of Lebanese villages in south Lebanon likewise benefited from rehabilitation initiatives of ESCWA, implemented in cooperation with other partners. These included the delivery of technical assistance to improve social and living conditions; training to improve skills in various areas and generate employment opportunities; assistance in the establishment of water supply projects; and assistance in the introduction of ICT in schools and of an e-caravan.

110. The ESCWA region so far has not coped well with the globalization process. Economic growth has been slow and the region's share in the global economy remains below its resource base and potential. The main underlying factor limiting the size and growth of gross domestic product in the region is the low level of investment — which has an inverse relationship with political instability. The integration of the ESCWA and Arab countries into the world economy remains at a slow pace, as a result of the external trade structure and trade policies.

111. According to the flagship publication "Annual review of developments in globalization and regional integration in the countries of the ESCWA region", there is a need for serious and intensified efforts to diversify exports. The development of trade in services represents a significant solution. There is a need to enhance the competitiveness of Arab exports in domestic and world markets. This implies that the Arab countries give increased consideration to different production variables, including productivity, trade policies, and quality and quantity control in order to confront future developments. The annual review offers an assessment of the manifestations of globalization in the Arab countries and the importance of expediting Arab regional integration and the means to that end.

112. ESCWA has provided substantial support to help its member States cope with and adapt to the multilateral trading system. Its mandate in this area extends beyond its membership to include all Arab countries. Eleven Arab countries acceded to WTO and five countries currently have observer status. Extensive policy advice provided by the secretariat assisted the member States in understanding the implications of WTO agreements and in preparing to join WTO by meeting its requirements. Support was also provided to member States that have joined WTO in the implementation of the relevant agreements. The Arabic documents on WTO issues published by ESCWA enabled Arab countries to follow closely developments in this regard.

113. The implications of WTO agreements on regional energy services, regional export competitiveness and intellectual property rights were addressed in a number of meetings organized for this purpose. ESCWA also provided advisory services and training workshops on the various aspects of the multilateral trade negotiations, particularly on trade in services and intellectual property rights.

114. The ESCWA-organized Arab Ministerial Meeting deliberated on issues discussed at Cancun and considered progress made in the Doha Development Agenda. The Ministerial Meeting was effective in coordinating positions of the Arab countries and enabled them to present a vision that reflected their priorities and concerns. The report of the meeting was issued later as a WTO document.

115. Regional cooperation and integration is considered as an effective way of helping to create an engine for greater economic growth and hence increase employment opportunities. It will also serve to instigate increased productivity and specialization in the region.

116. In its efforts to facilitate regional integration and encourage intraregional trade, ESCWA has been promoting various aspects of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq. The development of road and railways agreements will result in the standardization of infrastructure specifications and signals across the region, ultimately leading to the facilitation of trade. The Road Agreement, the first to be signed under the auspices of ESCWA, came into force on 19 October 2003. The Railways Agreement was signed by eight countries. ESCWA has also underscored the importance of establishing national trade and transport facilitation committees, and five member States have already initiated steps to establish such committees with ESCWA assistance.

117. The Committee on Transport, at its fifth session in March 2004, agreed on a draft memorandum of understanding on maritime transport, moving a step further towards the development of an integrated transport system, covering the road, rail and maritime sectors.

The Millennium Development Goals

118. All five regional commissions are also focusing on how better to assist their member States' efforts to meet the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals. They work to support these goals and related targets, particularly those of the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, of developing a global partnership for global development, of ensuring environmental sustainability and of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Their support to the Millennium Development Goals has taken several forms of research, policy analysis and advocacy, promoting policy dialogue through their intergovernmental forums, including the sharing of best practices, and the development of codes and indicators, as well as monitoring their implementation. For example, the work of ECE in promoting environmental sustainability includes the development of legislation, monitoring of its implementation and the assessment of achievements. The Commission serves as the secretariat for these legally binding instruments, which contain detailed commitments by countries to improve the environmental situation, many of which go further and into more detail than the Millennium Development Goals.

119. All five commissions are particularly seized with the issue of reliable and comparable statistical data, which is indispensable for analysing relevant information and for the formulation and implementation of policies to create an enabling context for reaching relevant targets by 2015. In this regard, ESCWA has been working with member countries and the specialized agencies of the United Nations in the region to provide support for reporting on Millennium Development Goals, in addition to compiling and disseminating Millennium Development Goal data. ESCAP, through its report on Promoting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: meeting the challenges of poverty reduction (2003) has taken a broader view of the state of achievement in the region and the report indicates that the region is on course to meet one of the most fundamental targets — that of halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day. ECLAC is

particularly concerned over the application of the Millennium Development Goals to the regional conditions, through fine-tuning or disaggregating each indicator or even through the definition of complementary ones. In addition, ECLAC has drawn attention to the major implications deriving from the acute and multidimensional inequities prevailing in the region for both the measurement of progress and for the formulation of policy. ECA has placed the Millennium Development Goals and support to the implementation of NEPAD at the centre of its work programme. Against the background of the enormous challenges in mobilizing adequate resources to finance the Millennium Development Goals, ECA convened a special session of its Big Table forum in Washington, D.C. in October 2003 to examine how best the policies and practices of the Bretton Woods institutions could contribute to Africa's efforts towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The discussions particularly emphasized the need for coherence between the policies of these institutions, the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction strategy papers.

IV. Interregional cooperation

A. Information technology for development: a regional perspective

Information and communication technologies and the digital divide

120. A growing concern among the developing countries is that, while the world is increasingly becoming globalized, in all regions significant gaps persist between and within countries in levels of progress in ICT development. Moreover, the world's poor could be even more marginalized in a knowledge-based globalized economy.

121. Of the 25 countries or economies listed as having "high access"[2] in the ITU Digital Access Index (DAI), published in 2003, none is from the ECLAC, ECA, or ESCWA regions. The index measures the overall ability of citizens to access and use information and communication technologies.[3] A more distressing fact is that, of the 55 countries listed as having "low access"[4] under the DAI ranking, as many as 38 are African. Of the rest, 10 are Asian or Pacific, 3 from the ECLAC region and 2 each from Central Asia and the ESCWA region. Even within countries, the "digital divide" is considerable. In many developing countries, the contrast can be quite dramatic, especially due to the large concentration of people still trapped in illiteracy or rudimentary education. In Asia, according to ESCAP, there is a troubling picture of an estimated 46 million children in South and East Asia who are still not enrolled in primary school — 11 years away from the deadline set in the Millennium Development Goals. In sub-Saharan Africa, the primary school enrolment ratio in school in 2001 was less than 60 per cent. Yet another dimension of the "digital divide" is the continuing inadequacy of women's participation, which is pervasive in all regions.

Regional scenarios

122. Policy development challenges posed by the "digital divide" are wideranging, and at the programme level each of the regional commissions reviewed its activities to ascertain how ICTs are affecting societies and people's lives in their respective regions. ECA, ESCAP and ESCWA have established specific subprogrammes devoted to this area and in the case of ECE, its related ICT activities took advantage

of its established expertise in trade, transport and trade facilitation, as well as in regional norms and standards setting. In ECLAC, the core ICT activities are pursued under the subprogramme "Productive, technological and business development". All of the commissions have been increasingly engaged in mainstreaming ICT. In addition to providing important regional inputs to the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the regional declarations adopted at the high-level regional meetings also provided blueprints for action in the respective regions for addressing the central issues for progress towards an information society.

ECE region

123. The ECE region includes many of the most digitally advanced countries, as well as countries in Central Asia with some of the lowest levels of ICT development in the world. There is evidence that the digital divide is widening. However, experience shows that this trend can be reversed. For instance, within only a few years of reaching political consensus among the major political parties to spend annually 0.2 per cent of its GDP on developing Internet access, especially in primary and secondary schools, Estonia has become a leader in Internet use.

124. The Bucharest Declaration of November 2002, in which ECE played a significant and catalytic role, set forth the fundamental principles and main strategic priorities for developing an inclusive knowledge-based economy and bridging the "digital divide". These principles are already reflected in several ECE regional and subregional activities. The ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) actively promotes the principles and priorities of the Bucharest Declaration. Legislative proposals to implement this Convention were recently adopted by the European Commission.

125. ECE launched a series of e-assessment reports to help member States, especially those with economies in transition, move towards a knowledge-based economy. It is also encouraging regulatory convergence and approximation of norms and standards in the region. In the area of trade, ECE is working to facilitate electronic business, especially through standards for electronic data interchange (UN/EDIFACT), web-based standards and the integrated use of paper and electronic documentation (UNeDocs project). In the area of transport, ECE is examining new technologies known as Intelligent Transport Systems and introducing provisions on these new technologies into relevant ECE agreements and conventions to make transport more efficient, safer and more environmentally friendly.

126. During the period 2004-2005, ECE will assist countries willing to organize subregional meetings to promote implementation of the information society and to facilitate the exchange of best practices and policies among its member States. Kyrgyzstan has offered to host one of the subregional meetings, to be focused on the situation of the Central Asian and CIS countries, which will be jointly organized by ECE and ESCAP.

ESCAP region

127. Despite significant steps taken to expand the telecommunication infrastructure and liberalization of the telecommunication sector in most countries of the region, the goal of universal access has not been achieved. The diversity of the region and differences in the levels of development of its countries are also reflected in the

huge disparities in the key ICT development indicators. ITU data indicate that only 11 economies have teledensity above 25 per cent and Internet users ranging from 10 to 56 per cent of the population: 11 economies have teledensity between 10 and 25 per cent and Internet users ranging from 1 to 25 per cent of population; and 25 economies have teledensity below 10 per cent and Internet users ranging from .02 to 8 per cent of the population.[5]

128. Policies and measures to provide access to the general public, for example telephone/Internet kiosks run by franchises, have helped in providing access to the unconnected. Many countries have set up special school programmes for providing access to the Internet. As an example, in India, Shiksha-Net connects 6,700 schools to the Internet. Nepal is using radio-based distance education to train primary school teachers for ICT-based education. Many countries in the region are giving attention to providing broadband access and some of them are significantly raising their investment in the area by as much as three times more than the global average. E-commerce has flourished in the region during the past few years, substantially promoting trade in goods and services.

129. Guided by the Tokyo Declaration, the work of ESCAP in this field has been geared to providing support to countries for the development of cross-sectoral policies that enable them to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by ICT. It is promoting ICT applications in key sectors, through support for key national institutions. ESCAP is also facilitating flow of expertise from the region's relatively advanced countries to the less advanced countries. Coordination among the various regional partners is undertaken by an inter-agency working group set up at the initiative of ESCAP in August 2001.

ECLAC region

130. The focus in the region is not so much on production of the technology, but rather on its effective use. Since it is estimated that electronic transactions could make up as much as 20 per cent of the Latin American and Caribbean region's GDP in the near future, the transition to a digital economy represents a real opportunity to raise productivity levels in the region. ECLAC analysis of the relationship between Internet connectivity and per capita income shows that most countries in the region are below the statistical norm. Countries in Eastern Europe (such as Estonia, Slovenia or the Czech Republic) do not have much higher per capita incomes, but their connectivity rates are far higher.

131. ECLAC has underscored the fact that the internal "digital divide" in the region is more worrisome than the international one. The ECLAC region has the most unequal income distribution in the world. This inequality is reflected in its inhabitants' access to information technology. Especially among minority and marginalized groups (such as indigenous women), illiteracy rates are very high. According to ECLAC, the probability of having a computer in the household is five times higher for non-indigenous parts of society than it is for indigenous groups.

132. One of the most commonly used policies in the ECLAC region for dealing with the "digital divide" is based on the shared access model. In addition to public sector initiatives, there are a variety of business models for reducing the "digital divide". For example, the number of Internet users per Internet host is up to 14 times higher in Peru than in other ECLAC countries. The number of Internet users, including female users, in other countries is also rising fast. In Argentina, 45 per

cent of new users have been female. According to ECLAC, apart from the question of access in quantitative terms, the "digital divide" is also reflected in the quality of ICT use. Online transactions are still very limited in the region.

133. The intergovernmental seminars, expert meetings and regional workshops organized by ECLAC before the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and since then to realize the Bavaro Declaration have supported the efforts by its member States to promote ICT for development. ECLAC also acts as a clearing house for national strategies, developing conceptual and methodological frameworks, and facilitating regional dialogue and the exchange of good practices.

134. ECLAC operates the Observatory on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC). In close cooperation with partners worldwide, OSILAC is compiling ICT indicators for the region, seeks to centralize these data and works to standardize and harmonize ICT-related indicators across the region, in addition to constructing new indicators.

ECA region

135. Although in recent years a number of countries in Africa have introduced policies and strategies to harness ICTs to advance their socio-economic development, the continent still faces profound challenges of access of its population to digital opportunities. It was in this context that, during its reform process, ECA recognized these realities and, at its initiative, the Conference of African ministers responsible for economic and social development and planning adopted the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). The Organization of African Unity Heads of State Summit endorsed AISI in July 1996. A key component of AISI is the development of national e-strategies, or the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans. AISI is also a mechanism for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa; seven of the eight Millennium Development Goals are addressed by the AISI framework.

136. ECA joins the African member States multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental partners, as well as representatives of the private sector in implementing AISI through e-policy formulation and implementation, development of knowledge resources, awareness-raising and outreach activities involving all major national stakeholders. It has provided support to over 28 African countries to develop their own NICI policies, plans and strategies. In October 1999, ECA organized the African Development Forum 1999 to bring the message of ICT within the context of globalization and the knowledge-based economy. AISI was reviewed during the Forum, from which, in addition to the NICI plans, the following initiatives were launched:

The SCAN-ICT project, which was piloted in six countries to measure the ICT penetration and its impact on socio-economic development. The project will be expanded to incorporate all the NICI countries to monitor NICI implementation and also implementation of the Millennium Development Goals; and

Awareness-raising for policy makers, parliamentarians, academia, the media and civil society organizations is spearheaded by the Information Technology Centre for Africa through on-site and mobile workshops and exhibitions,

which were supplemented by additional outreach products, such as the AISI Radio Series and AISI briefing papers.

137. In addition to its harmonization activities with the African Regional Economic Communities, AISI serves as the framework for coordination of the support that United Nations agencies provide to NEPAD. Under the NEPAD regional consultation meetings, the ICT cluster met in September 2003 to discuss the involvement of the United Nations agencies in the implementation of the NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan on Infrastructure. The subcluster also organized several forums in preparation for the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

138. An important vehicle for AISI partnership is the Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa (PICTA). ECA is also a leading member of the Global Knowledge Partnership and hosts the regional node of the United Nations ICT Task Force. As a major means of supporting the implementation of national e-strategies, ECA, in its capacity of regional node of the global e-Policy Resource Network, in collaboration with Industry Canada provides expertise, guidance and advisory services in areas such as e-commerce, legal and policy frameworks, telecommunications policy, e-government and connectivity issues. In recognition of the role of virtual libraries in development, ECA launched in 2001 the African Virtual Library Network.

139. The African regional preparatory conference for the World Summit on the Information Society, known as "Bamako 2002", which was coordinated by ECA, produced the Bamako Declaration used by various African stakeholders to make Africa's voice better heard during the Geneva process. As a follow-up to the Bamako Declaration, which provides a blueprint for regional follow-up of the first phase of the World Summit, ECA is assisting the African countries to prepare for the second phase of the Summit in Tunis in 2005. In that connection, it organized a meeting of the African ministers in charge of information society issues in Dakar, Senegal on 19 and 20 April 2004. ECA is also organizing a regional preparatory meeting for the Tunis Summit, to be hosted by Ghana from 2 to 4 February 2005.

140. The cooperation and coordination activities started between the various regional commissions during the Geneva phase will be strengthened during the Tunis phase and beyond to enable them to share experiences, learn from each other and build joint programmes.

ESCWA region

141. The ESCWA region has suffered from low levels of growth in general and a failure to keep pace with the information revolution in particular, largely as a result of the prevailing lack of political stability, wars, disputes and occupation. Wide disparities in income in the region also hinder progress. The average Internet penetration in the region, at 2.6 per cent is still very low compared to the world average of 10.5 per cent. Moreover, in view of the importance of content in a knowledge society, local content creation is a major asset. Hence, there is strong and urgent need to develop and promote original web content in Arabic. Arab Internet users were estimated at 0.9 per cent of Internet users worldwide in mid-2002, while people speaking the Arabic language represent about 5 per cent of world population.

142. Most ESCWA member countries are taking some steps to build national Internet capacity. Further, there are some successful regional connectivity solutions currently linking the area internally and with the rest of the world, such as the Fiber Optic Gulf network. Gateways are being set up as part of a decisive national strategy to increase connectivity and bandwidth availability. This is especially the case for Egypt and Yemen. Mobile communications are being increasingly liberalized. Some countries with higher penetration rates, such as the United Arab Emirates, have moved to e-learning web portals and multimedia as vehicles for awareness campaigns. In other countries, such as Syria and Egypt, Governments subsidize the provision of personal computer equipment to schools. The Gulf States and Jordan are implementing plans to connect all schools to the Internet. The United Arab Emirates Knowledge Village Initiative can be a model for the creation of a knowledge community that utilizes ICT and its applications in all domains, including education. Nonetheless, despite the importance of having a regional structure connecting the various national structures across the region, there are still no real plans for such a crucial strategic endeavour. The absence of a regional structure contributes to the high cost of connectivity, which is reflected in lower penetration rates of basic Internet services and delays the widespread dissemination of e-commerce and e-transactions.

143. The Beirut Declaration, currently under implementation by ESCWA, contained recommendations on key issues facing the region in the area of ICT, such as the formulation of national and regional ICT policies; enhancing ICT infrastructure; developing appropriate ICT indicators; implementing and standardizing e-government applications; promoting e-learning, e-health and e-business applications and tools; promoting digital content in Arabic; developing human capacity in ICT through training and education. ESCWA will cooperate with the relevant partners in the region in organizing a regional conference in Beirut from 28 to 30 September 2004 preparatory to the Tunis Summit.

The task ahead

144. At the regional levels, the World Summit on the Information Society has considerably raised awareness of the issues related to bridging the digital divide and the use of ICT as a tool for development by policy makers. Every effort should be made to remove obstacles to ICT implementation. Two of the most pressing issues identified in the World Summit Plan of Action are Internet governance and the financing of ICT for development. Together with their member States, the United Nations regional commissions should strive to develop concrete approaches for resolving these issues.

145. The regional commissions provide valuable platforms for general policy discussion and formulation and help countries develop policy guidelines, identify best practices and carry out cross-sectoral initiatives. They can also assist countries in developing national e-strategies as well as in the preparation of country readiness assessment reports and in defining targeted technical assistance programmes. One area, in particular, in which the regional commissions have expertise is the development of statistical indicators. The World Summit process has brought into focus the need for cooperation among the relevant organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, and other partners for developing an adequate methodology for the measurement of selected indicators, as well as benchmarking and monitoring progress of implementation of the outcome of the Summit. Regional

Commissions have been cooperating with the United Nations ICT Task Force, the Statistical Commission of the Economic and Social Council, DESA, ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD and OECD in this area. The regional commissions are also cooperating among themselves on a project, "Interregional partnership for promoting trade as an engine of growth through knowledge management and information and communication technologies", funded by them under the Development Account. This project will be implemented by all the commissions during the period 2004-2006. It is aimed at strengthening the international competitiveness as well as the negotiating capacity of developing countries by sharing knowledge on problems and prospects for trade promotion and diversification, trade facilitation policies and the use of ICT in supply chain management. In addition, the regional commissions are working together to prepare a "Handbook of ICT indicators" and a "Web-based prototype ICT system".

146. ICTs are not an end in themselves; rather they are a means towards achieving an information society, which is a multifaceted, multidimensional concept. For the developing countries, the primary appeal of ICTs lie in their development potential, which is inextricably interlinked with economic, social and cultural considerations. Thus, the most significant and valuable contribution that the regional commissions can make in support of their respective membership is by helping anchor their policy perspectives and analytical work relating to ICTs and the information society firmly on the socio-economic and cultural imperatives that are unique to each region/subregion and country. The commissions' in-house multidisciplinary capacities provide a unique opportunity to advance this objective.

B. Cooperation among the regional commissions

147. In its resolution 1998/46, annex III, the Council encouraged interregional cooperation and regular interaction between the regional commissions in order for them to share each others' best practices. Encouraged by the Council and, more recently, by the General Assembly, the regional commissions have intensified their cooperation in a number of areas during the period under review. Some of the joint projects undertaken are funded by the Development Account. These primarily focus on capacity-building in their respective member countries, particularly for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the commitments of United Nations conferences and summits. More and more, these projects have sought to address cutting-edge issues in development, such as ICT capacity-building; sustainable management of natural resources and their efficient use; trade facilitation and electronic business; capacity-building for managing globalization; and promoting new technologies for employment and poverty alleviation. Several of these joint projects have among their objectives the exchange of experiences and good practices for promoting intercountry and subregional cooperation or cooperation between the regions. For instance, the joint ECE/ESCAP project to promote rational and efficient use of energy and water resources in the economies of Central Asia resulted in the creation of a bilateral commission on the Chu and Talas Rivers between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which attracted support from Sweden, the United Kingdom and OSCE.

1. Transport and transport facilitation

148. Cooperation between the regional commissions in the area of transport and transport facilitation continues to improve, especially with regard to joint projects that are being jointly executed, such as "Capacity-building through cooperation in developing interregional land and land-sea transport linkages".

149. ESCWA introduced the above-mentioned project at the second International Euro-Asian Road Transport Conference, held in Tehran on 6 and 7 October 2003. Focal points were identified for the preparation of country reports and ESCWA has received thus far the national reports from Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Because of the prevailing conditions in both Iraq and Palestine, it is not currently possible for their reports to be prepared. ESCAP and ECE introduced the project at the third International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport, held in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, on 11 and 12 September 2003, and at the seminar on Transport Infrastructure Development for a Wider Europe, jointly organized by the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, the European Commission, ECE and the European Investment Bank, which took place in Paris, in November 2003.

150. ECE and ESCAP have received nominations for focal points from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine. Nominations are pending from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Moldova, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as from the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Development Bank.

151. ECA has finalized the terms of reference for the national consultants and is in the process of recruiting them. ECA jointly organized with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States a meeting on Transit Transport Cooperation, from 5 to 7 May 2003. The meeting adopted a list of the main corridors in sub-Saharan Africa, which represent the well-established, historical routes in the region and form the backbone for intraregional, intercontinental and domestic trade.

152. In preparation for convening an expert group meeting in September 2004 on the development of interregional linkages, ESCWA has prepared the terms of reference for the regional consultants who will make presentations on interregional linkages. The first Interregional Workshop on Euro-Asian Transport Linkages was held in March 2004 in Almaty, back to back with the ninth session of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation, with the lead country of the Project Working Group, Kazakhstan.

2. Trade facilitation

153. The regional commissions have continued their well-established cooperation in the field of trade facilitation. In 2004, further consultations between them have taken place on a joint project, "Interregional partnership for promoting trade as an engine of growth through knowledge management and information and communication technologies", to be funded from the Development Account.

154. In connection with the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries, held in Almaty on 28 and 29 August 2003, ECE organized a parallel event on trade facilitation in which ESCAP, ECA and ECE participated. The event was supported by a report prepared by ECE: "From analyses to implementation — introducing trade and transport facilitation measures in an integrated framework". The Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP gave two keynote presentations focusing on the need for trade facilitation and an integrated approach to transport solutions for landlocked countries.

155. Practical bilateral cooperation between the regional commissions has also taken place. Representatives of ECE participated in trade facilitation events with ESCAP in Bangkok and with ESCWA and UNDP in Damascus. In Bangkok, the meeting worked on a document for a "Proposed step-by-step methodology to identify problems related to trade facilitation". In Damascus the event focused on promoting trade facilitation and electronic business in the Arab region.

3. ECE/ECA/ESCWA cooperation in the Mediterranean

156. ECE, ECA and ESCWA are cooperating in the field of water management. In this connection, substantial experience with management tools for monitoring, assessment and management of internationally shared groundwaters is available at the regional level, especially within ECE. In the Western Asia region, ESCWA has been involved in various aspects of inter-State cooperation in the management of shared aquifers, and is planning to introduce a framework convention for groundwater management in the region.

157. With ESCWA as the lead party, ECE will participate in a project with the objective of strengthening the capacity of water management institutions in the Mediterranean region to implement sustainable forms of utilization, management and protection of internationally shared groundwater resources. The project will contribute to water sustainability and the availability of water for drinking and food production, contributing to the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals on access to safe drinking water supplies and poverty and hunger eradication.

Capacity-building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean region (e-Med)

158. The e-Med Business project, funded from the Development Account, is a joint ECE, ECA and ESCWA project which provides capacity-building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean region. It aims at an integrated approach for simplifying trade procedures in the region, using internationally agreed recommendations, norms and standards. The project focuses on trade facilitation issues in the non-European Union Mediterranean countries, members of ECE, ESCWA and ECA. In addition, the programme addresses capacity-building and technical cooperation projects for the implementation of ECE recommendations through the UNeDocs project.

159. In the ESCWA region, following the completion of national studies, a national workshop will take place in each participating country, starting with Jordan, followed by a regional workshop and a regional seminar. In tandem with the e-Med project, ESCWA is promoting the creation of committees on trade and transport facilitation in member countries, in order to put in place a framework for ongoing

consultation and cooperation between the public and private sector stakeholders in the field of trade facilitation.

160. The ECA regional seminar in Morocco brought together country managers and representatives of the public and private sectors of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as a trainer from the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce, Grenoble. The seminar stressed the importance of promoting the supply chain management concepts, sensitizing on and promoting United Nations Trade facilitation and e-business standards, including success stories in developing countries. The national seminars in Algeria and Tunisia identified that there is no "one-size-fits-all" trade facilitation and e-business strategy. Representatives of government agencies and the private sector requested ECA and ECE to further explore possibilities for providing effective technical assistance to implement national trade facilitation recommendations.

4. Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

161. Since 1998, ESCAP and ECE have been working jointly within the framework of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), which is aimed at strengthening capacities of the Central Asian countries, which include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The process of cooperation in each of the priority areas has been steered by the relevant project working groups (PWG-Transport, PWG-Energy and PWG-Tajikistan) with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively, as the lead country for each group.

162. The project working group for transport held its ninth session in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 12 and 13 March 2004, back to back with the first Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages. At this session, the working group discussed the implementation of the Action Programme for Transit Transport Cooperation for SPECA Countries as part of the follow-up to the International Ministerial Conference, held in Almaty in August 2003.

163. Under the auspices of the working group for energy, ECE and ESCAP successfully implemented a US$ 1.75 million Development Account project on rational use of energy and water resources in Central Asia over the period 2000-2003. The major outcome of the project was the formulation of the Cooperation Strategy to Promote the Rational and Efficient Use of Water and Energy Resources in Central Asia, approved in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. As a follow-up to the adoption of the Strategy, ECE and ESCAP, jointly with OSCE, have been providing support to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the establishment and operationalization of their bilateral commission on the Chu and Talas rivers.

164. The International Economic Conference on Tajikistan in the Context of Central Asia took place in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in April 2003. The Conference approved a number of policy documents, including the Strategy of Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia, aimed at strengthening cooperation among Central Asian countries in such areas as macroeconomic management, international trade and foreign direct investment. ESCAP is expected to undertake follow-up activities to the International Economic Conference, in close cooperation with the Government of Tajikistan.

165. To renew the efforts and dialogue with the Central Asian countries in order to engage them fully in the process of cooperation under SPECA, the United Nations Secretary-General has, through his letter of 25 February 2004 to the Presidents of SPECA member States, defined SPECA as a Central framework for mobilizing and coordinating United Nations activities aimed at supporting the development goals of the countries of the subregion, encouraged the member States to participate more actively in SPECA activities. The Secretary-General has also suggested that the Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP jointly visit all SPECA countries in order to discuss with the respective country's authorities how to further strengthen the Programme. Action is being taken to arrange the proposed visits over the next few months.

166. Within the framework of a project entitled "Promoting sustainable energy development partnerships for implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in the Asian and Pacific region", funded by the Government of Japan, ESCAP organized a workshop in Bishkek in April 2004, to promote a clean development mechanism in Central Asia. The workshop was attended by representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

5. ECE/ESCAP cooperation in the field of energy

167. ESCAP is cooperating with ECE on the fourth tranche of the Development Account project entitled "Capacity-building for air quality management and the application of clean coal combustion technologies in Central Asia", for which ECE is the lead agency. This project builds on the cooperation between ESCAP and ECE on the project on energy and water efficiency in Central Asia implemented in 2000-2003. ESCAP will participate in the energy portion of the new project, in particular in the series of three seminars to be organized under Work Package 5 of the project on "Strengthening of sustainable energy policies and energy pricing reforms". In addition, ESCAP and ECE cooperated on the United Nations Foundation supported project "Energy efficiency investment project development for climate change mitigation" in 2000-2003.

168. The five regional commissions participated in the meeting of the Ad Hoc Group on Energy on 14 and 15 April 2004 at FAO Headquarters in Rome, organized by the High-level Committee on Programming to agree on the terms of reference for system-wide collaboration in the area of energy. The commissions met before that meeting to explore how best to present the regional perspectives to the meeting and to consider future interregional joint activities.

6. Statistics

169. Statistical capacity-building and keeping pace with developments in this field have an important bearing on the work of the regional commissions on various substantive issues. In view of their comparative advantage in this area, it is appropriate that they cooperate on statistics.

170. During the period under review, on gender statistics ECE, ECLAC and ESCWA exchanged information on the development, structure and content of databases and efficiently shared tools. In continuation of this cooperation, the regional commission intend to collaborate to identify a common set of basic indicators which will be the statistical framework for the regional reports to be submitted to the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. ECE, ESCAP

and ESCWA jointly made inputs into the process of preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and participated in the working group to review indicators for gender equality and empowerment of women.

171. Furthermore, the regional commissions pooled efforts in the field of health statistics and particularly disability statistics. ESCAP coordinated with ECE and ESCWA its plans to develop a training guidebook on disability statistics and the three regional commissions approached WHO in a coordinated way in order to facilitate further cooperation.

7. Gender equality

172. All the regional commissions are collaborating to develop gender indicators for monitoring the progress achieved in implementation of the Beijing Conference, as well as to link these indicators to the Millennium Development Goals. ECLAC is the lead agency in this exercise, and its database allows for the members of the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality to provide data required for system activities within the context of the Millennium Declaration.

173. Under a Development Account project, ESCWA is collaborating with ECA in capacity-building of national machineries for women, which will be replicated in the Arab region. There are also plans to execute a joint project on women with common cultures in ESCWA, ECE (Eastern European countries), ESCAP (Muslim countries) and ECA (Muslim and Arab countries).

174. All of the regional commissions are preparing to contribute to the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action and to provide the necessary regional inputs to the process. In that connection, a meeting was held in Paris in July 2003 between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the five gender focal points of the regional commissions for the purpose of collaboration and consultation on a questionnaire sent to member States in preparation for regional meetings for Beijing + 10.

8. World Summit on the Information Society

175. The regional commissions recognized early the need for integrating an information and communication technologies (ICT) dimension into the development process of countries in their respective regions and to mainstream an information society perspective in their overall work. This prompted ECA, ESCWA and ESCAP to establish specific subprogrammes devoted to ICT for development, while ECLAC and ECE took advantage of existing subprogrammes to give focused attention to the needs of their member States in this area. Their early initiative enabled the commissions to assist the countries in the preparatory process for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in December 2003. In addition, the regional preparatory meetings organized by the commissions, in close cooperation with other regional stakeholders, in their respective regions provided important regional inputs to the Geneva phase of the World Summit, while also resulting in the adoption of specific regional action plans for addressing the core issues for promotion of the Information Society. Since then, the regional commissions have been utilizing the momentum gained to implement the

recommendations of the Geneva phase of the Summit, on the one hand, and their respective regional blueprints for action, on the other.

176. The regional commissions are now preparing to organize appropriate regional and/or subregional meetings, with the involvement of other relevant stakeholders, to enable their respective member States to participate effectively in the second phase of WSIS, to be held in Tunis next year. They are also coordinating their relationship with the secretariat for the Tunis phase of the World Summit through nominating ECA as their focal point, following the rewarding experience gained from a similar arrangement for the Geneva phase when ECE served as their focal point.

177. The regional commissions have taken advantage of close interaction among their respective secretariats during the process leading up to the Geneva phase of the Summit to forge greater substantive cooperation among themselves and to benefit from each others' experiences and good practices. They have also undertaken specific initiatives to promote interregional cooperation for the joint publication of an ICT handbook, the preparation of an appropriate joint project for funding by the next (fifth) tranche of the Development Account, as well as the development of ICT indicators, in cooperation with other relevant partners. In this spirit, ECLAC participated on behalf of the regional commissions at a meeting of relevant international organizations, hosted by OECD in Paris on 29 April 2004. The meeting agreed to invite the regional commissions to be partners in the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, which currently consists of UNCTAD, ITU, OECD and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. The Partnership is an opportune mechanism for the organizations concerned to continue their joint efforts in the area of ICT statistics and indicators, to coordinate technical cooperation activities in developing countries and to mobilize funds through a coherent approach vis-à-vis the donor community. The partnership will also provide a framework for the organization of the "global summary meeting" in early 2005. This meeting was proposed by the joint ECE/UNCTAD/ITU/OECD/Eurostat Workshop on Monitoring the Information Society (8-9 December 2003), which was organized as a side event at the World Summit in Geneva. Further, the Paris meeting agreed to set up a geographical division of labour for data collection, in which ECA, ECLAC, ESCWA and ESCAP will be called upon by OECD to assist it in obtaining the relevant missing data for their respective regions.[6]

9. Programme planning

178. In the context of result-based budgeting and the new guidelines for preparation of the Medium-Term Plan (MTP), the chiefs of programme planning in the regional commissions held a joint meeting from 10 to 12 September 2003, hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok. The objective of the meeting was to enhance cooperation among the commissions, with a view to promoting greater exchange of good practices in different areas of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Such cooperation would ensure greater coherence in programme planning between the regional and global entities through providing greater clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of these entities.

179. The programme planning chiefs reviewed several issues, including the need to further fine-tune the various elements of the logical framework approach as a basis for results-based budgeting taking into account the particularities of each regional commission; the need to fit all activities of the commissions, both core and

extrabudgetary project-related, within the results-based budgeting logical framework and to ensure the link between activities and expected accomplishments.

180. The programme planning chiefs also agreed that interregional cooperation should be reflected in the overview of the Medium-Term Plan and the regional commissions should collaborate in presenting interregional cooperation activities in the programme budget. In that regard, they recommended that possibilities for interregional cooperation involving the five commissions be explored in several important areas of work, such as social indicators; poverty reduction assessment; new and renewable energy; and urbanization and environment. The programme planning chiefs also underscored the necessity of reflecting cooperation and joint work in the programme budget of each regional commission and the global entities concerned, in line with the guidance provided by the Economic and Social Council and the follow-up recommendations to that effect by the Executive Secretaries at the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. The thematic groups established by the Committee should facilitate this in the preparation of future programme budgets.

Notes

[1] See also the report of the Secretary-General on integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields (E/2004/65).

[2] High access countries or economies: Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Republic of Korea, Norway, Netherlands, Hong Kong (China), Finland, Taiwan (China), Canada, United States of America, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, Luxembourg, Austria, Germany, Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, Italy, France, Slovenia, Israel.

[3] It is based on five areas: availability of infrastructure, affordability of access, educational level, quality of ICT services and Internet use.

[4] Low access countries: Zimbabwe, Honduras, Syria, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Sao Tomé and Principe, Tajikistan, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Nicaragua, Lesotho, Nepal, Bangladesh, Yemen, Togo, Solomon Islands, Uganda, Zambia, Myanmar, Congo, Cameroon, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Haiti, Nigeria, Djibouti, Rwanda, Madagascar, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Bhutan, Sudan, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, Mozambique, Angola, Burundi, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger.

[5] Data source: ITU *Regional Road Map Towards an Information Society in Asia and the Pacific*, annex I, table 1. "Asia-Pacific region telecommunication development statistics".

[6] See also section IV.A of the present report.